

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Statue of US President George H. W. Bush inaugurated on Szabadság Square

UPCOMING EVENTS

Budapest General Assembly meeting

Foreign ministry issues certificates of support to companies

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

ORBÁN HOPES TRUMP WILL BE RE-ELECTED

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has expressed hope that US President Donald Trump will be re-elected to his post in the upcoming elections.

Presenting a high state award to outgoing US Ambassador David B. Cornstein, Orbán said that everything had changed after Trump's election four years ago and the designation of the ambassador to serve in Hungary.

"The United States showed an open, honest and friendly approach towards Hungary. Thanks to Ambassador Cornstein, Hungarian-American relations have been restored to their original lustre," he said. The two countries have developed broad cooperation in diplomacy and foreign affairs; the United States is helping Hungary as a friend and Hungary is acting as the US's friend in international politics, he said.

Orbán thanked Ambassador Cornstein for "bravely sidelining those who have an interest in generating tension between the United States and Hungary". "The ambassador knows Hungarians well, he understands what we think about central Europe, the EU and the United States and why, and he knows the key to their heart," Orbán said.

Thanking the award, Cornstein called the prime minister his friend and a partner, adding that ties between Orbán and President Trump are very good.

ORBÁN, US AMBASSADOR UNVEIL GEORGE BUSH STATUE IN BUDAPEST

“Hungarians have always regarded the United States as a home of freedom,” Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said at the inauguration of a statue of George Herbert Walker Bush, the 41st president of the United States, on Budapest’s Szabadság Square.

In his address, Orbán noted that 19th-century Hungarian statesman Lajos Kossuth had been given “a heartfelt welcome” in the US. He also said that the US embassy, located in the square, had given shelter to Cardinal József Mindszenty for 15 years after 1956. “We will never forget that the embassy’s door was always open, thanks to the personal commitment of Mark Palmer, US Ambassador in Budapest between 1986 and 1990, to the young Hungarian democratic opposition,” he said.

Referring to two memorials in the square, one of German and the other of Soviet occupation, Orbán said that “they send the message that if you are Hungarian, you only have two options: either side with an occupying force or support freedom”. “And today, we are here to honour with this statue our friend, George Herbert Walker Bush,” Orbán said, noting that it was erected next to a statue of President Ronald Reagan, calling them “two men from America who started the fight against global communism”.

Orbán noted that during his visit to Budapest in July 1989, President Bush expressed support for the democratic youth’s request “to free Hungary from Yalta” since the freedom and independence of central Europe had also been the president’s dream. “What we wanted was not to move closer to but become part of the free world,” the prime minister said.

Addressing the unveiling ceremony, David B. Cornstein, the outgoing US ambassador, said the statue was a symbol of US-Hungarian relationship and optimism for the future.

“The desire for freedom had never left the Hungarian people, and the collapse of communism in 1989 brought a new dawn to the hopes of freedom-loving people here and everywhere. President Bush’s visit to Hungary in July 1989 was a symbol of that hope,” the ambassador said.

He said President Bush had dedicated his life to address freedom around the world and help lifting people up. “A modest man with extraordinary vision and compassion, President Bush helped the people of Central and Eastern Europe to free themselves from communist rule,” he said.

The ceremony was attended by representatives of the Bush family and foundation, former New York State governor George Pataki and former US Ambassador April H. Foley.

Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Hungarian Prime Minister’s Office, and Ambassador Cornstein announced in early September the placement of the Bush statue in Szabadság Square

to mark the 30th anniversary of the fall of communist rule in central and eastern Europe.

SIXTY-THREE DIE, INFECTIONS UP BY 2,079

Sixty-three Covid-19 patients, mostly elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died in the past 24 hours, and registered coronavirus infections went up by 2,079 to 63,642, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Tuesday. The death toll rose to 1,535, while 16,446 people have made a recovery. There are 45,461 active infections, while 2,891 patients are hospitalised, 243 on ventilators. Fully 27,050 people are in official home quarantine, while the number of tests carried out stands at 1,002,093.

Border controls and entry restrictions remain in place and citizens have been asked to avoid participating in large events. Wearing a face mask is obligatory in shops, on public transport and in cinemas, theatres, shopping malls, as well as in health and social-care facilities and at open-air events, including sports events. Restaurants and entertainment venues must close at 11pm.

Schools are in an autumn break during which the facilities are undergoing disinfection, the portal said. Visits to hospitals and nursing homes are banned.

Budapest (17,781) and Pest County (7,971) have the most infections, followed by the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (3,912), Borsod-Abaúj-

Zemplén (4,014), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (3,322) and Hajdú-Bihar (3,082) and Csongrád-Csanád (2,794). Tolna County has the fewest infections (638).

MEDICAL CHAMBER RECOMMENDS RESTRICTIONS TO FIGHT EPIDEMIC

The Hungarian Medical Chamber recommends more restrictions to fight the novel coronavirus epidemic and proposes “constructive dialogue” with decision makers in the modernisation of the health-care system.

The chamber said in a statement that based on international trends, the epidemic can be expected to quickly deteriorate and neighbouring countries have already introduced measures based on expert recommendations. It called on the government to take immediate action “on the verge of a health-care crisis, in the interest of doctors and patients”.

The chamber proposed stricter and more consistent rules for mass events, including tighter control of mask-wearing and social distancing regulations. It also proposed further restrictions on the opening hours and number of guests in restaurants and entertainment venues, and the reintroduction of shopping times reserved for elderly people who are most threatened by the epidemic.

The chamber said the government “left the medical chamber alone in the fight against virus sceptics and groups belittling the dangers of the epidemic.”

It called for cooperation in order to prevent such groups from creating a fake sense of security and reduce the effectiveness of personal protection.

The chamber also said that current screening and contact tracing capacities were insufficient for monitoring the spread of the epidemic and the government should draw the public’s attention to the importance of individual prevention and reducing the number of social contacts.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: MINORITIES NO DOMESTIC AFFAIR

Issues around minorities cannot be considered domestic affairs “under any European or international law”, the Hungarian foreign minister said. In a video posted on Facebook, Peter Sziijártó noted the Ukraine foreign ministry’s recent summoning of the Hungarian ambassador and banning the entry of two Hungarian officials saying that they had interfered with Ukraine’s domestic affairs.

Sziijártó insisted that Ukraine’s interpretation of “interference” was not clear, whether it referred to “the Hungarian government’s sending 50 ventilators to Ukraine..., Hungary being the only country allowing Ukrainian nationals transit to Western Europe, or the Hungarian central budget financing the revitalisation of one of the most polluted rivers in Ukraine”.

Ukraine’s move is “pathetic and a nonsense”, while it sends the message that the country has “given up its endeavours towards European and

Euro-Atlantic integration, and waived its need for Hungary’s support in the process”, Sziijártó said, adding that aspirants for integration needed unanimous member support both in the EU and in NATO.

The Hungarian government continues to be ready to build good neighbourly relations and conduct a dialogue “but the recent period has demonstrated that this readiness is unilateral”, Sziijártó said. The minister assured Transcarpathian Hungarians of his government’s full support and congratulated ethnic Hungarian party KMKSZ on its “historic, landslide” victory in Ukraine’s recent municipal elections.

SEMJÉN CONGRATULATES KMKSZ ON LOCAL ELECTION SUCCESS IN UKRAINE

Zsolt Semjén, Hungary’s deputy prime minister, has congratulated László Brenzovics, the leader of Ukraine’s ethnic Hungarian KMKSZ party, on its success in Ukraine’s recent local elections. In a video message posted on Facebook, Semjén called the election result a “great success” ensuring KMKSZ seats in Transcarpathia’s county council.

SZIJJÁRTÓ HOLDS TALKS IN ALGERIA

The European Union cannot stem illegal migration without cooperation by the countries of North Africa,

Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Algiers. "Unless we can closely cooperate with North African countries, further hundreds of thousands or even millions will come to Europe," he warned.

According to Szijjártó, it is "high time" Brussels changed its policies and supported countries in the region in preventing their residents from leaving rather than promoting migration and a quota regime. "We urge the European Union to amend its association agreement with Algeria as initiated by the Algerian side," he said. This move would boost economic development, strengthen stability in Algeria and help prevent masses of migrants from flooding the EU uncontrollably, he added.

Szijjártó said that he had reviewed with Algerian counterpart Sabri Boukadoum the situation in the region south of Algeria and established that security had deteriorated in countries from where masses of migrants set off to Europe. New conflicts have developed in the Sahel, there are 900,000 internally displaced persons in Mali, terrorist organisations and religious extremists threaten the region and the economic situation is deteriorating as a consequence of the novel coronavirus epidemic, he said. "Accordingly, one must expect an increasingly severe pressure of migration on the EU," he added.

Szijjártó said it was vital for the EU to work together with rationally thinking countries in north Africa, like Algeria. Over the past two months, Algeria

liquidated 12 human smuggling gangs on its territory, he said, noting that the country, similarly to Hungary, had voted against the United Nations' Global Compact for Migration.

Szijjártó said Hungary had offered a hundred scholarships in higher education to Algeria and these attracted 1,170 applications last year. The Hungarian embassy in Algiers also acts on behalf of NATO, he said, adding that the number of Hungarians will be increased from 4 to 24 in the EU's Mali training mission.

Algeria has considerable gas reserves and Hungary would like to purchase from them in order to increase diversification, he said. Hungarian companies participate in developing agricultural technologies for Algeria and the government plans to create opportunities for Hungarian water management companies to re-enter the Algerian market, he added. The two countries have started talks on investment protection and the elimination of double taxation, Szijjártó said.

BENKŐ: ARMY DEVELOPMENT PROGRESSES AS SCHEDULED

The development of the Hungarian Armed Forces progresses in line with schedule, the defence minister told parliament's national security committee. In a regular annual hearing, Tibor Benkő said that the Hungarian army should become a significant

power for the region to guarantee peace, security and stability in central Europe. This requires technical developments carried out in line with a detailed defence and army development programme, he added.

The programme dubbed Zrínyi 2026 was launched in 2017 and repeatedly updated since then to address new challenges, he said, adding that planning is already under way with an outlook for 2030-2032. The minister presented in detail the completed and planned elements of the army development programme. He cited as an example the arrival of the first Airbus H145M military helicopters in 2019 and noted that out of 20 such helicopters ordered by the army, 16 will have arrived by the end of this year. He also said that Airbus A319 transport aircraft have been set up in a way to make them suitable also for rescue operations.

Commenting on arms manufacturing capacities in Hungary, he said that more than 14,000 small arms assembled in Kiskunfélegyháza in southern Hungary were delivered to soldiers last year.

The minister said that he had signed a letter of intent and Ferenc Korom, the commander of the Hungarian Army, a contract on missile purchases. The contract envisages the purchase of 120 missiles in the first phase, and possibly another 60 later.

Benkő said that the security environment had deteriorated, with great challenges posed by certain unstable countries in the Middle

East, Asia and Africa. This is also assumed to be the cause of illegal migration and numerous examples have demonstrated that these developments pose a threat to western civilisation, he added.

Hungary has been effectively handling illegal migration since 2015, Benkő said. The Hungarian army has been involved in guarding the borders in line with demands expressed by the ministry of the interior since the introduction of laws on border protection, he added. This remained a priority task last year, with 11,000 soldiers participating in border protection and control, he said.

Benkő said that in line with NATO and Hungarian projections, security and defence threats have been established from the east and south. Deterrence is important in handling threats from the east, in protection against Russia, but dialogue must also continue, he said. Threats from the south also pose complex challenges to NATO members, including Hungary, he added.

Central Europe and Hungary are at the crossroads of threats from the east and south, he said. This has been the reason for a decision to set up a multinational central European command based in Székesfehérvár.

FINANCE MINISTER: GDP COULD BE DOWN BY 6.4% IN 2020

The GDP of Hungary could fall by 6.4% this year and economic trends could start to change from the second

quarter of 2021 with a vaccine against the coronavirus possibly available by that time, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said at an annual hearing before a parliamentary committee.

The finance ministry is working to restore the country's growth momentum and a proposal covering the years 2020 to 2023 is being drawn up for financial restructuring, the minister said, adding that it is clear the economy will only recover at a slow pace from the coronavirus pandemic.

Varga told the committee that allocations for the government's pandemic defence fund originally came to 426 billion forints (EUR 1.2bn) but expenditures have reached 747 billion forints by the past months. Meanwhile 942 billion forints was initially transferred to the economic defence fund but the amount of used funding is now at 2,059 billion forints.

The budget deficit in 2020 will be significantly higher than in past years and will be around 8-9% of GDP according to the ministry's calculations, Varga said.

NUMBER OF JOBSSEKERS FALLS CLOSE TO 300,000

The number of registered jobseekers in Hungary fell to 306,000 in October, about 70,000 fewer than the June peak, state secretary for employment policy Sándor Bodó said, commenting on the latest monthly report by the National Employment Service (NFSZ).

The number of jobless has fallen for the 19th week in a row, Bodó said.

The NFSZ data report shows the number of jobseekers fell by 5%, or 17,300, from September. The number was up by 28%, or 66,700, from the same month a year earlier. School-leavers accounted for about 26,000 of the total number of jobseekers, and people under 25 years of age for around 43,500. The long-term unemployed made up 26% of the total. Close to 156,900 of the jobseekers were ineligible for benefits.

GULYÁS: GOVT TO ALLOCATE EXTRA HUF 9.9 BN TO AGRICULTURE CHAMBER

The Hungarian Chamber of Agriculture (NAK) will benefit from extra funding of 9.9 billion forints (EUR 27m) in the next three years, the head of the Prime Minister's Office told a press conference.

Gergely Gulyás said that the funds could be used to improve the system of local agriculture managers, as well as to "share information necessary to effectively utilise European Union funding". The funds will ensure that NAK's communications services can be continued, he said.

Agriculture Minister István Nagy noted the crucial importance of getting and sharing information, and said that the government had re-allocated a further 800 million forints to help the chamber "provide public services taken over from the state".

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**SIDES DISAGREE AT EP
DEBATE ON INVOLVEMENT
OF POLITICAL INFLUENCE
AT SZFE STANDOFF**

Sides were in disagreement at a European parliamentary debate about whether political parties are influencing the current standoff at the Budapest’s University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE).

Attila Vidnyánszky, head of the board of a foundation that took over the university on Sept. 1 under a government decree, told the CULT Committee on Culture and Education’s online debate that all current developments were orchestrated by left-wing political parties. The parties concerned launched their electoral campaign on October 23 instead of expressing solidarity, Vidnyánszky said commenting on a protest march organised by students. He said the board had clear intentions wanting to implement changes in demand for several decades but the SZFE “is increasingly demonstrating exclusion

rather than moving towards openness and diversity”, he added. “We are open to negotiations and cooperation in any form,” he said. The students should demonstrate that they are “indeed open and are ready to accept new ideas, methodologies and aesthetic approaches”, he added.

State secretary at the Ministry of Innovation and Technology László György said that more than a dozen consultations had been held with SZFE leaders before the model change was implemented in line with the constitution and current legal regulations, as part of the modernisation of Hungarian higher education. The new model will ensure increased autonomy to the institution and budget support will grow four-fold, he added.

László Upor, former deputy rector of the university, said the SZFE had never acted in line with a political agenda and its demands had always been in protection of autonomy. The institution was “forced into restructuring” which caused a loss of autonomy, he said. Its senate has lost

the right to appoint the university’s leaders, he added. Upor said they had rejected invitations to talks after none of the university’s requests and demands were accepted at preliminary negotiations. “Changes were implemented without the university’s involvement,” he said.

Hanna Milovits, head of the SZFE student government, said the university’s restructuring had been carried out in an undeserving manner because government representatives refused to negotiate with anyone among the SZFE’s former leaders and students. The students are “forced to maintain” a blockade of the university buildings because “under the current circumstances the university’s autonomy is not guaranteed”, she said.

SZFE’s previous senate and leadership announced their resignation on Aug. 31, saying the foundation that took over the university had deprived them of “all essential powers”. The students cordoned off the university’s main building and employees went on strike.

